Iraq, U.S. Policy, and the Future of the Transatlantic Alliance

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"There can be little doubt that the divisions revealed during the crisis in Iraq stem from real and growing structural differences between the Unites States and Europe—differences in capabilities, perspectives, and strategies. Yet we reject the conclusion that the breakup of the transatlantic alliance is therefore inevitable."

—Philip H. Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro[1]

Introduction

Much time, effort, money, and blood have been spent on keeping the Transatlantic Alliance strong. America fought to maintain peace in Europe in the early 20th century during World War I—and when that war turned out not to have been "the war to end all wars," America and its allies fought again for European and world peace in the Second World War. Following WWII, world leaders sought to create organizations to assure and preserve peace in Europe.

In 1949, an alliance of the United States, Canada, and fourteen other Western Countries formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).[2] And, in an effort to further unite European interests—on a common economic and political agenda—French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman initiated the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1950.[3]

Today, fifteen years after the break-up of the Soviet Union, NATO continues to survive as it works to bring European nations together on security and defense issues. Its Partnership for Peace Program continues to bring more than twenty countries—including Russia—together to plan and participate in joint military exercises.[4] NATO membership expanded in 1999 to include Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary—and since March 2004, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia have all joined the alliance.[5] In 1992, the Treaty of Maastricht completed the metamorphosis of the ECSC into what we now call the European Union (EU) which, among other accomplishments, has brought Europe together into a single market; promoted freedom of movement without need for frequent passport and customs checks between states; adopted a economic and monetary union (EMU); and created a single currency, the euro.[6] On November 20, 2000, defense and foreign ministers at a conference in Brussels

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pledged to supply the EU with resources for a military force capable of providing "60,000 troops within 60 days… [and the capability to sustain the force] for at least a year."[7]

Although the United States is not a member of the EU, it has long nurtured and supported its goals. However, into this long-standing cooperative environment of United States/European harmony entered new Bush Administration policy initiatives on Iraq. In a departure from past policies, the United States insisted the international community contribute forces to a coalition designed to rid Saddam Hussein of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and force him out of office.

Although the United States justified a pre-emptive invasion on its right of self-defense supported by intelligence that Saddam had WMD and links to international terrorist organizations, NATO and EU heavyweights such as Germany and France did not agree with the WMD analysis—nor did they concur on the need for Iraqi regime change. As a result, when Iraq was invaded in 2003, United States-European harmony was shattered, prompting the noted military intellectual Robert Kagan to question if "the west" even continues to exist.[8]

Over the last two years, the rift caused by the preemptive attack on Iraq has caused many others to question the future of the Transatlantic Alliance. The intent of this article is to analyze whether or not the existing breach in relationships can be mended in a manner that will reflect in the pre-Iraq status quo. Despite what Kagan and other skeptics have asserted, I will show that the centrifugal forces promoting cooperation and harmony outweigh centripetal forces that have encouraged destabilization. In order to make this case, this paper first introduces the players in the transatlantic divide and identifies where the lines—for or against the United States-led invasion of Iraq—were originally drawn. Using Kagan's work as a point of departure, I will then discuss the United States-European cultural divide and the ultimate power of transatlantic interdependence. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of the U.S. administration's recent move toward diplomacy, including post-2004 U.S. presidential election visits to Europe, which illustrate the recognized need by players on both sides of the Atlantic to seek and find common ground.

The Cultural Divide: Americans are from Mars, Europeans are from Venus

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of the EU, many have said that Americans and Europeans have had fundamental differences in the way they view and approach problems. Robert Kagan, in his book *Of Paradise and Power* says "[i]t is time to stop pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world, or even that they occupy the same world."[9] Kagan maintains that in the post Cold War period the United States continues to exercise power politics by flexing its military muscle. The Europeans, on the other hand, have moved to a different level by using laws, rules, transnational negotiations, and diplomacy to form public opinion and shape the international environment.[10] Since the end of the Cold War, "average European defense budgets gradually fell below two percent of GDP." In the United States, however, defense spending remained above three percent GDP.[11] While the United States continued its two-war strategy in the 1990's, individual European states lacked the ability to fight even one war. Therefore, Kagan concludes that "on major strategic and international questions today, Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus: They agree on little and understand one another less and less."[12]

Kagan's analogy is powerful because it plays on our subconscious. He likens the United States to Mars and, interestingly, the Roman god of war. Most of continental Europe is compared to Venus, the goddess of love. By playing on these stereotypes, the United States is cast in the role of the testosterone packed hegemonic superpower. Our European friends however—to borrow an idiom from California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger—are cast as the weak-kneed "girlie-men"

of power politics. In reality, although there are indeed cultural difference between the United States and Europe, Kagan's analogy paints a false picture.

The Venusians, consisting primarily of France and Germany (dubbed "Old Europe") were against the United States-led preemptive invasion of Iraq in 2003. It is also interesting to mention that Russia also said no to U.S. efforts.[13] And just to make a note of it—although this paper will not look at this in depth—China and India (some calling them "Old Asia" to spite all the talk of "Old Europe") also called for an "immediate stop of military actions against Iraq…"[14] Of those holding UN Security Council seats, France, Russia, and China each did business with Iraq, but France was the most interdependent trading partner, holding billions of dollars of unexecuted petroleum contracts. As such, France was also the most likely country to use its UN Security Council veto to protect its commercial interests in Iraq.[15]

Britain, Spain, and Italy were in the original Martian camp, and served as the original members of the coalition of the willing supporting President Bush. Also, former communist countries in the "new Europe" generally were supportive of the United States.[16] In March 2003 Colin Powell stated that 45 countries supported U.S. action in Iraq. The United States also had 15 "anonymous" allies.[17] When the United States finally led the invasion of coalition forces into Iraq, and subsequently occupied it, the total force consisted of 130,000 U.S., 11,000 British, and 15,550 troops from 29 other countries.[18]

Since that time, in addition to consistent British support, there have been 28 other non-U.S. forces participating with the United States-led "Martian" coalition in Iraq. Albania, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Estonia, Georgia, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, South Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, and the Kingdom of Tonga have all deployed ground troops. Over time, there have been defectors from the Martian camp: Spain once had troops there but pulled out in 2004 following the Al Qaeda-inspired terrorist attacks on trains in Madrid, which led to the fall of the pro-U.S. government. Others that have gone from the ranks of the willing to the unwilling include Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Philippines, Thailand, New Zealand, and Hungary.[19]

Director of Army Operations, LTG James Lovelace, has reported that he expects the U.S. Army to maintain roughly 120,000 Troops in Iraq through 2006.[20] It therefore appears that the United States is in this fight for the long haul. The real question regards the tenacity of its national will, the effects of international pressure on it, and whether or not a long term presence in Iraq will hobble efforts at rebuilding the trans-Atlantic alliance.

Kagan argues that American national will shall remain strong due to a sense of "pride in [its] military power and… special role in the world."[21] Certainly Kagan is correct for the time being, but as the war continues, and the price in blood and national treasure mounts, one wonders if the American people will remain committed. At the core of U.S. legitimacy is the question of whether or not the United States-led invasion of Iraq was warranted, and whether the Martian or the Venusian interpretation of events will hold sway with the American people.

The Rational for the Invasion

In his book *The Threatening Storm*, Kenneth Pollack paints a picture of Saddam as a man with a history of making bizarre and erratic decisions, and who often throws caution and common sense to the wind. He cites poor or no risk assessments when Saddam decided to launch a war with Iran, when he attacked the Kurds, and when he invaded Kuwait during the first Gulf War. He goes on to say that these actions paint a picture of an "irrational, megalomaniac" and show that "Saddam can not be deterred."[22] Pollack stresses:

...the terrible danger that, once in possession of nuclear weapons, Saddam will take this as a license to invade Kuwait, and otherwise terrorize the Middle East … [a] nuclear-armed Saddam taking over Kuwait and threatening Saudi Arabia leaves the [United States] with a choice between ceding him control of the world's oil supply, or of sending the worlds economy into radical shock, perhaps for years.[23]

Similar thoughts laid the foundation for the United States' invasion, and Britain's support of it. In their eyes the past containment of Saddam's Iraq was simply not good enough anymore. This belief, coupled with what they thought to be credible intelligence that Saddam indeed possessed WMD and the means to deliver them, meant Saddam had to go. Regime change was a must, and the only way this could be accomplished was preemptively—thus was the premise of the United States-led invasion from the Martian vantage point.

Countries dissenting from the United States' view saw things as Ivan Eland did, the director of the Cato Institute, who called the Bush Administration's policy on Iraq a "high-testosterone response."[24] Eland differed with those who believed that the United States-led containment policy in Iraq had failed. He believed that an attack on Iraq would only result in high casualties, become a recruitment tool for Islamic terrorists, and distract needed resources away from defending against terrorism at home. Eland pointed out that a United States-led invasion could potentially destabilize other friendly countries in the region such as Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. He ultimately believed that an invasion would cost billions of dollars, a sacrifice a great deal of political capital with the rest of the international community, and that the long-term occupation of Iraq would eventually cause the price of oil to skyrocket.[25]

Simply put, the Venusians had doubts about whether or not Saddam really posed a threat—and the issue of whether or not a preemptive strike was legal was never fully answered to their satisfaction.

The Legality of the Invasion

As one might expect, on the issue of whether force should have been used against Iraq there was a divergence of legal opinion. The more aggressive Martian camp argued "that military action [was] justified… either on the basis of self-defense or on the basis of previous UN resolutions, including resolution 1441…"[26] However, the more pacific Venusians said that there was "no actual or imminent threat from Iraq that would justify a self defense response… and that nothing in resolution 1441, or any other UN resolution, authorizes the use of force…"[27]

Article 51 of the UN Charter addresses individual or collective self defense which is, "a right under customary international law."[28] Under Article 51, any threat to the United States, United Kingdom, and its allies had to be imminent, so "the mere fact that Iraq [had] a capacity to attack at some unspecified time in the future [was] not enough."[29] Article 42 of the UN Charter states that if the standard of imminent threat is not met, the Security Council decides if "force is necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security".[30] The UN's answer was spelled using Article 42 through UN Resolution 1441.

At Security Council meeting 4644 held on November 8, 2002, the UN "warned Iraq that it [would] face serious consequences as a result of its continued violations of its obligations…"[31] The words "serious consequences" fall short of the words "all necessary means" that were used to authorize force in Iraq in 1991, and in Rwanda, Bosnia, Somalia, and Haiti.[32] Therefore, to address this critique, the Martian camp noted that Iraq failed to comply with the ceasefire requirements of UN Resolution 687, passed at the end of the 1991 Gulf War. In litigating the Martian position, they have even reached back to UN Resolution 678—passed at the start of the Cold War—to justify continued aggression against Iraq. However, that resolution only authorized "such force as was necessary to restore Kuwait's sovereignty."[33]

If there was not an imminent threat, was there at least a credible threat? And, was the use of force legitimate in the eyes of the international community? James Crawford, professor of international law at Cambridge University posed the following viewpoint in 2004:

"It comes down to a political judgment. If Iraq had retained weapons of mass destruction, that would have been the breach. The question was whether earlier resolutions delegated to individual countries the right to act by themselves. It is very unlikely it would have done so without express language which they used in the earlier Kuwait resolutions. Where you had quite a different question of assessment, the likelihood that the UN Security Council would have allowed countries to form their own judgment seems doubtful."[34]

In the Venusian camp, Old Europe did not believe the U.S. and its allies had the right to act, the United States-led Martian camp believed it did have that right. Neither side flinched and both saw the rational for or against an invasion differently.

A New Chapter in Transatlantic Cooperation: Diplomacy, Diplomacy, and More Diplomacy

Even though minor efforts were being made to shore up differences, many in Europe were apprehensive and concerned as the 2004 United States' presidential election drew near. Patrick Higonnet, a French academic, did well to sum up the state of the Transatlantic Alliance. Prior to the election he echoed Kagan in stating, "We are living through a great turning in the history of this old couple which was formed between America and Europe, quarrelling but nevertheless lasting. Today, a divorce seems to me unavoidable."[35]

The conservative wave which had swept the United States in the previous four years and particularly since the 9/11 disaster was either not well understood by most Europeans, or rejected by many who did. Europe had learned many lessons from WWII and had come to rely on, and greatly value, consensus over power politics in international relations. Preemptive intervention was not well accepted, nor understood in the concert of European Countries that have systematically given up elements of state sovereignty to a broader European sovereignty as expressed by the European Parliament. "Even before the vote, a vast majority expressed their support for John Kerry, and most of the European press—including *The Economist*—had endorsed the Democratic candidate."[36]

Patrice de Beer perhaps said it best when, in his November 8, 2004 article appearing in *Yale Global Online*, he wrote: "The day after the U.S. reelection of George W. Bush, Europe woke up with a hangover…"[37] Common ground in the eyes of many, between the United States and Europe (take away Briton) had been lost in the Bush I (the first Bush) Administration and there was little hope that the Bush II agenda would set a different course. Thus, it is safe to say that many Kagan observers were surprised when the Bush Administration reversed itself, and adopted a policy of diplomacy, diplomacy, and more diplomacy with its traditional European partners.

Simply put, unilateralism had not paid dividends. If the United States wanted to maintain long term international cooperation with its most important economic and military allies, a change in tone and a move toward diplomacy had to take place. The obvious could not be overlooked. As the former Deputy Foreign Minister of Poland, Radek Sikorski, recently stated, "in the two [U.S. interventions] where we had United States-European cooperation, in Afghanistan and Ukraine, we have had success at a much lower cost than the third one, Iraq."[38]

In February 2005, under a new sprit of cooperation, a Compact was published in Washington and London entitled the "Compact between the United States and Europe." It was drafted in the form of a diplomatic agreement and signed by fifty-five foreign policy and national security experts from

both sides of the Atlantic. Although every signatory of the Compact did not agree with each specific proposal, overall consensus between them was agreed to in the following areas:

- **Iraq:** The United States shall start a strategic dialogue with European allies on Iraq's future through a new contact group. The EU will commit itself to train 5,000 senior civil servants and 25,000 Iraqi security and police forces per year. The EU will grant $1 billion in reconstruction funds and write off 50 percent of Iraqi debt.
- **Iran:** The United States and the EU insist that Iran permanently and verifiably end its fuel recycling program. The United States declares its support for the EU's nuclear dialogue with Iran. EU countries declare their readiness to impose meaningful penalties on Iran if it refuses to end its nuclear fuel recycling program or withdraws from the Nonproliferation Treaty.
- **China:** The EU declares that if it lifts its arms embargo against China, it will replace it with a reinforced code of conduct on arms sales. The EU will invite the Unites States, Japan, and others to provide a specific list of weapons and technologies that they consider would negatively affect security and stability in the region. The United States reiterates its opposition to a lifting of the arms embargo but refrains from taking action so long as these measures are not violated. The EU expects China to ratify the UN convention on civil and political rights.
- **The International Criminal Court:** The United States reaffirms its concerns about the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court but will not impose punitive measures on nations that support it. The United States shall not oppose a resolution by the Security Council referring to the situation in Darfur, Sudan, to the ICC.
- **The Geneva Conventions:** The United States and EU countries will apply the Geneva Conventions to all battlefield combatants they capture in the war against terrorism.
- **Middle East:** The United States and EU members affirm that encouraging the peaceful development of democratic societies that respect human rights in the broader Middle East is a central strategic aim of their foreign policies. They will establish an Independent Foundation for Democracy in the Middle East and jointly contribute $100 million over the next five years to its activities.[39]

In addition to the Compact, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and President George W. Bush embarked on European visits with a new agenda. Paving the way for President Bush, Secretary of State Rice met first with EU leaders to engage in dialogue over several areas where United States and European cooperation needed attention. These included "Iraq, global trade, domestic security, Israeli-Palestinian peace, and in broader Middle East reforms."[40] This was a drastic but well received about face from her statements eighteen months ago when she—as then U.S. National Security Advisor—said "the best way to deal with [Russia, Germany, and France] was to: Forgive Russia, Ignore Germany, and Punish France."[41]

President Bush followed Condoleezza Rice into Europe. After her week-long fence mending trip, he set an obvious change in tone toward our European allies. He made it clear that the United States was determined to do all it could to put its differences aside and set a new agenda. While in Brussels, the home of the EU and NATO, he said "[o]ur strong friendship is essential to peace and prosperity across the globe, and no temporary debate, no passing disagreement of governments, no power on earth will ever divide us."[42]

By all accounts the European trips were viewed as a success. There was a feeling of celebration among White House officials who felt they had found common ground with their European allies, particularly in the area of help for Iraq.[43] Senator Orrin Hatch stated, "I think the president's whole European tour turned out to be very productive… [Richard Burt, former arms control negotiator under President George H.W. Bush, said] I think this is the—maybe the first step of what's going to be a long journey."[44] Discussions were positive both in tone and substance. The President demonstrated that he was prepared to listen, openly supported the idea of a European Union, and—although he did stress the importance of promoting democracy—he also listened to

what the Europeans had to say.[45] Even after a brief run-in with Russia's President Vladimir Putin over backpedaling on democratic reforms and sales of nuclear equipment to Iran, "Putin told a news conference … he was satisfied with the results of his meeting with Bush [and went on to say] their talk was useful."[46]

Conclusion: No Aliens, only Humans

History teaches us that differences in opinion and temporary rifts between the United States and Europe are nothing new. "Episodes such as the 1956 Suez crisis, the French expulsion of American Troops in 1966, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the debate over the Euro missiles or Central America in the early 1980s, are all reminders that the Atlantic alliance has always had to confront deeply divisive issues."[47] The costs of a failed Alliance far outweigh any benefit a continued feud over Iraq—or other recent issues of discontent—would bring: "an erosion of trust among leaders… domestic political pressures toward confrontation… the end of NATO as an effective tool for common military actions… escalation of trade conflicts… a diminishing willingness of either side to stand by the other… and, ultimately, political rivalry in the Middle East."[48]

Although Kagan is right to note the policy differences between Europe and the United States, at a more fundamental level his metaphor is wrong. His book is a clever and well crafted bit of writing, but it is also based on a largely inaccurate assessment that misses the deeply rooted and tightly binding foundations that will guarantee future transatlantic cooperation. Kagan focuses on thin veneer and temporary national policy disagreements. He forgets the core philosophy of Western Liberalism and shared history and experience of Western Civilization. U.S. and European people have bonded together over time through shared sacrifice and have strong memories of collective victories. They have been together on a common front in the fight against fascism, communism, and have faced economic challenges together. These experiences serve as powerful glue that binds the people of the United States and Europe together. At their philosophical core, Americans and Europeans have more in common than not, and recent events show a genuine concern by both sides to mend differences.

In the end, the distinction between "Old Europe" and "New Europe" will become a footnote in the long history of loose rhetoric that has given color to the drab process of diplomacy throughout the ages. I concur with a French critic who remarked "nothing in the world can be done without the United States.[49] He also stated, "There is very little the United States can achieve alone."[50] Convergence will occur because powers on each side of the Atlantic need each other. There are no aliens in the transatlantic alliance, only humans, us and them, one and all.

About the Author

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